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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*President Leone's Election Strengthens
Center Parties in Italy*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
28 December 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

President Leone's Election Strengthens Center
Parties in Italy

1. The election on 24 December of former premier Giovanni Leone as President of Italy with the near total support of the center parties will arrest the sense of inevitable drift to the left in Italian politics. The Communists were victorious in their implacable opposition to Amintore Fanfani, despite his control of the Christian Democratic party machinery and despite the endorsement he received from diverse groups outside the parties. But the Communists were not able to defeat Leone. Even on the final ballot, they went along with the Socialists in support of elder statesman Nenni, who lost. The vote highlighted the dividing line between the left-wing parties and the winning coalition. This the Communists had tried hard to avoid.

The Election

2. In the longest presidential election since World War II, Giovanni Leone was elected on the 23rd ballot with 518 votes. He needed 505 to win in the electoral college. In addition to his own Christian Democratic Party, Leone was supported by the Liberals, the Social Democrats, and the Republicans. The Christian Democrats turned to him when, after 19 ballots, they failed to elect their first choice, Senate president Amintore Fanfani. Fanfani was defeated primarily because certain members of his own

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party, who feared that his authoritarian views would make him too strong a president, would not support him. Their coolness prevented him from pushing his vote above the 400 mark, the figure the Liberals and Republicans reportedly had set as a precondition for their support of his candidacy. The Christian Democrats chose not to turn to another front runner, Foreign Minister Aldo Moro, because the leftist parties had indicated they would support him. The Christian Democrats did not want to give the impression of choosing a candidate dictated by the Communists and Socialists.

3. When--after 21 ballots--the Socialists and Communists had failed to win enough votes for their candidate, Socialist Deputy Premier Francesco de Martino, they switched to former Socialist Party leader Pietro Nenni in an effort to block Leone. But the maneuver failed to attract any substantial number of votes from the center. Instead the center swung to Leone, who missed election by only one vote on the 22nd ballot. On the following ballot, Leone completed his consolidation of the center vote to win.

Significance for the Parties

4. The Communists and the Socialists have suffered a defeat. They made an all-out effort either to defeat the Christian Democrat candidate or at least to elect a Christian Democrat acceptable to them. The parties of the center demonstrated a solidarity that had long been lacking in Italian politics. This is especially notable in the case of the Christian Democrats. Although thirty or forty delegates held out against Fanfani, the party showed remarkable cohesion in sticking by him for 19 ballots. His leading rival in the party, Moro, loyally supported Fanfani as the party's designated candidate. When the Christian Democratic Party switched to Leone, the party delivered almost 90 percent of its votes to him. This support, combined with that of the other center parties, was enough to put Leone over. Internal discipline in presidential

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elections is a new experience for the Christian Democratic Party. It may augur a more effective role for the party in other political activities.

Impact on the Government

5. It is generally expected that the routine postelection resignation of Premier Colombo in January will be accepted. Colombo will most likely be asked to stay on as a caretaker premier until a successor is chosen.

6. Despite the split in the center-left ranks during the election, the Socialists are still part of the government and the present center-left alignment is not necessarily finished. Indeed, it is entirely possible that a further effort at center-left government will be made. It would be in keeping with Italian political custom if Fanfani were asked to follow Colombo as prime minister, a move that would be face-saving for him and conducive to minimizing party bitterness. The unhappiness of the Socialists over the election outcome, and their dislike for Fanfani would pose serious hurdles to his selection. Ensuing frictions could threaten the center-left coalition even under a prime minister more acceptable to the Socialists.

7. In any case, governments of short duration and protracted negotiations on the formation of new governments have been endemic to the Italian scene. The conflict between economic conservatism and labor-backed demands for further progress on social and economic reforms is likely to continue to be a prominent source of controversy over the next few months. Nonetheless, the center-left formula is likely to endure in some form at least until the next parliamentary elections, now expected in the spring of 1973.

8. The outcome of the election favors warm Italo-US relations because of Leone's political commitment to the Western alignment, his opposition to neutralism, and his consistent friendliness

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toward the United States. The exclusion of the Communists from the winning alignment is another favorable factor. While the neo-fascists almost certainly contributed to his margin of victory, Leone is staunchly opposed to the neo-fascist party and its ideology. The election results probably will not prevent the emergence of differences between Rome and Washington, particularly in view of the general trend toward a more independent and assertive Italian foreign policy.

9. Leone's election is no magic solution to political instability in Rome. And it is unlikely to impede seriously the long-standing Communist effort to cooperate with non-Communist parties on the regional level and in parliament.

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